

[0001] METHOD AND DEVICE FOR MERCHANDISING A PRODUCT

[0002] CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0003] This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/459,758, filed December 13, 1999, entitled "Signage Support Base," the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference herein as if fully set forth.

[0004] BACKGROUND

[0005] The present invention is related to merchandising devices. More particularly, the invention is directed to a merchandising method and apparatus incorporating coordinated first and second merchandising elements to market a product.

[0006] Signs and sign stands are used for a variety of purposes today with virtually all types of businesses. For example, signs and sign stands of various types are used for point of purchase displays inside establishments. Signs and sign stands are also used outdoors to advertise products and services to passing pedestrians or motorists.

[0007] It is desirable that point of purchase signs be lightweight and easy to install in the field, especially by persons of limited experience. Since business and product displays may be positioned outside of a restaurant or convenience store, it is desirable that the signs be positionable on both paved and soft surfaces and that the signs are usable during inclement weather. Most of the lightweight signs of the prior art that are not secured to the ground are unable to withstand the force exerted by winds over a major surface of the sign. This leads to signs being blown over and scratched or damaged.

[0008] Due to the increasing competition between advertisers, attracting the attention of consumers using a conventional sign has become more difficult. Thus, it is of paramount importance that a sign or other merchandising product be less prone to damage to maintain

maximum visual and aesthetic appeal for consumers. Additionally, it is often desirable for merchandising that the product being advertised by the sign be located near the sign location to facilitate impulse buying by a consumer.

[0009] Clearly, there is a need for a method and apparatus for merchandising a product that is easy to install, which can be positioned on any type of surface, which is able to withstand inclement weather and high winds, if used outdoors, and which can present a product to the consumer while maximizing the merchandising effect of the display by using a coordinated merchandising approach to marketing the product.

[0010]

SUMMARY

[0011] Briefly stated, one embodiment of the present invention is directed to a method of merchandising a product. The method includes: providing a base having a top portion and a lateral side; detachably engaging a first merchandising element to the lateral side of the base; attaching a shelving element to the base, the shelving element being adapted to support the product above the base; detachably engaging a second merchandising element to one of the base and the shelving element such that at least a portion of the second merchandising element is disposed generally over the shelving element; and coordinating the first and second merchandising elements to market the product.

[0012] The present invention is also directed to an alternative method of merchandising a product. The method includes: positioning a base on a supporting surface, the base having a top portion and a side portion; detachably engaging a merchandising element with the base; and detachably engaging a flexible merchandising element with the top portion of the base by sliding one end of the flexible merchandising element into the base through the top portion thereof, the flexible merchandising element being bendable in response to forces exerted in the direction generally normal to the flexible merchandising element to facilitate the stable positioning of the base, wherein the first and second merchandising elements are coordinated to market the product.

[0013] The present invention is also directed to an apparatus for merchandising a product including a base having a top portion and a lateral side. A first merchandising element is detachably engaged with the lateral side. A shelving element is disposed on the base and is adapted to support the product above the base. A second merchandising element detachably engages one of the base and the shelving element such that at least a portion of the second merchandising element is positioned on the side of the shelving element opposite from the base.

[0014] The present invention is also directed to an apparatus for merchandising a product including a base having a top portion and a lateral side. A first merchandising element is detachably engaged with the lateral side. A product supporting element is disposed on the base and is adapted to support the product above the base.

[0015] BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The foregoing summary, as well as the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention will be better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings. For the purpose of illustrating the invention, there is shown in the drawings embodiments which are presently preferred. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to the precise arrangements and instrumentalities shown. In the drawings:

[0017] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a first preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus according to the present invention;

[0018] Figure 2 is a perspective view of a second preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus according to the present invention;

[0019] Figure 3 is a perspective view of a third preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus according to the present invention;

[0020] Figure 4 is a perspective view, partially broken away, of a base usable with any one of the first, second or third preferred embodiments of the merchandising apparatus, illustrating the use of a slid able insert to engage a second merchandising element to the base;

[0021] Figure 5 is a perspective view of the base of Figure 4 illustrating the use of two posts to connect the second merchandising element to the base;

[0022] Figure 6 is a perspective view of the base of Figure 4 illustrating the use of a single post to connect the second merchandising element to the base; and

[0023] Figure 7 is a perspective view of a fourth preferred embodiment of the merchandising apparatus according to the present invention.

[0024] DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0025] Certain terminology is used in the following description for convenience only and is not limiting. The words "top" and "bottom" designate directions in the drawings to which reference is made. The words "inwardly" and "outwardly" refer to directions toward and away from, respectively, the geometric center of the merchandising apparatus and designated parts thereof. The terminology includes the words specifically mentioned above, derivatives thereof, and words of similar import. Additionally, the words "a" and "one" are defined as including one or more of the referenced item unless specifically stated otherwise.

[0026] Referring to the drawings in detail, wherein like numerals indicate like elements throughout, there is shown in Figure 1, a first preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus, generally designated 10. Figure 2 illustrates a second preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus, generally designated 12. Figure 3 illustrates a third preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus, generally designated 14. Figure 7 illustrates a fourth preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus, generally designated 15. Generally speaking, the merchandising apparatuses 10, 12, 14 use coordinated first and second merchandising elements 18, 28 (further described below) to market a product 20, such as golf balls, shoes, compact disks, vacation packages, food products, businesses, sport teams, candies, medicines, or the like. By providing an easy to configure and modify merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 having coordinated first and second merchandising elements 18, 28, the present invention allows retailers to effectively

market various products to consumers with a minimum amount of time adjusting the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 when changing the product being advertised.

[0027] As shown in Figures 1-6, the first through third preferred embodiments of the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 include a base 16 having a top portion 42 and a lateral side, or side portion, 44. As best shown in Figures 4-6, the top portion 42 of the base 16 is preferably generally rectangular with a slot 34 located therein. While the slot 34 is shown as extending generally across the entire length of the top portion 42, those skilled in the art will appreciate from this disclosure that the slot 34 can be truncated or discontinuous to form a single passageway or multiple passageways for receiving the second merchandising element 28 (further described below). The second merchandising element 28 can also be attached to the base via a post, or other connector, 24. The post(s) 24 can be integrally formed with the second merchandising element 28 without departing from the scope of the present invention. Alternatively, the second merchandising element 28 can be connected to the base 16 using any other suitable method, such as using fasteners, snap lock connections or the like.

[0028] It is preferred, but not necessary, that the lateral ends of the base 16 have a generally trapezoidal shape. The lateral sides 44 of the base 16 are preferably inclined to facilitate the viewability of signs mounted thereon. The base 16 can have a cylindrical shape or any other geometric or irregular shape without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0029] The base 16 is preferably formed from weather resistant, sturdy, high strength material such as a heavy duty polymer. The base 16 can also be formed from wood, steel, aluminum or the like without departing from the present invention. It is preferred, but not necessary, that the base 16 include four feet 48, each located on a bottom surface of the base 16 for contact with a supporting surface 36, such as a grassy surface, an asphalt surface, or a roof of a business establishment.

[0030] As shown in Figure 3, the base 16 can have a textured or colored surface to give the base 16 the appearance of a masonry element. For example, the base 16 can be textured and/or colored to resemble a rock, granite, marble, concrete, brick or the like.

[0031] Still with reference to Figures 1-6, the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 includes a first merchandising element 18 that is detachably engaged with the lateral side 44 of the base 16. The first merchandising element 18 is preferably any one of a cardboard or polymeric plate, a mirror, a metallic sign or the like. The first merchandising element 18 preferably includes a color, pictorial, overall shape, words, or any other indicia or feature that is directed toward merchandising or marketing the product 20.

[0032] The first merchandising element 18 is preferably slidably engaged with guide rails 32 that preferably extend laterally across the top and bottom of the lateral side 44. Alternatively, the merchandising element 18 can be attached to the lateral side 44 using hook and loop material, magnets, releaseable adhesives, suction cups, static charge, fasteners or the like without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0033] The present invention can include a first merchandising element 18 that is translucent. When the first merchandising element 18 is translucent, the first merchandising element 18 can be backlit by a light assembly (not shown) contained within the base 16. The light assembly can be powered by a source external to the merchandising assembly 10, 12, 14 via a power cord (not shown) or the light assembly can be powered by internally mounted batteries (not shown).

[0034] While the preferred shape of the first merchandising element 18 is rectangular, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate from this disclosure that the first merchandising element 18 can be circularly shaped, triangularly shaped, irregularly shaped or shaped as a facsimile of the product 20 being marketed without departing from the scope of the present invention. Additionally, when the first merchandising element 18 is supported via a magnet(s), multiple such merchandising elements 18 can be layered one over another

to allow for unprecedented speed in shifting between merchandising strategies and/or between products 20 being merchandised.

[0035] As mentioned above, the first merchandising element 18 can comprise a particular color or surface finish depending on the product being marketed. Referring to Figure 1 for example, when merchandising shoes, the first merchandising element 18 is preferably, but not necessarily, a mirror 22 that allows consumers to view the shoes that they are wearing while observing the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14, 15. Such a mirror 22 also allows consumers to try on and view the shoe products 20 being merchandised by the merchandising apparatus 10.

[0036] The first preferred embodiment of a merchandising apparatus 10 preferably includes at least one shelving element 30 (or product supporting element) disposed above the base 16 and adapted to support the product 20 above the base 16. The shelving element 30 is preferably supported via the slot 34 in the base 16. Alternatively, the shelving element 30 can be fastened directly to a portion of the base 16 to securely position the shelving element 30 above the base 16. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate from this disclosure that the shelving element, or product supporting element, can alternatively be a peg board system or a slat wall system used to support at least one product holding device.

[0037] It is preferable that the shelving element 30 include two racks that are spaced apart and spaced from the base 16. The shelving element 30 can extend generally outwardly in at least two directions. It is desirable, but not necessary, that the size of the shelving element 30 allows at least one of the product 20 to be located on the shelving element 30. The preferred shelving element 30 is formed from a wire mesh which reduces the weight of the shelving element 30 while providing high strength and rigidity thereto. The shelving element 30 can also be formed from suitable polymers, metal, thin wood, or the like without departing from the scope of the present invention. The shelving element 30 can be integrated with the second merchandising element 28 without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0038] Referring to Figure 7, a fourth preferred embodiment of the merchandising apparatus 15 is shown. Instead of shelves, the merchandising apparatus 15 can use either one of the peg board system 50, the slat wall system 52 or the like. It is preferred that at least one product holder 56 is used to support product 20 at one of various locations along the peg board system 50 or the slat wall system 52. While both the peg board system 50 and the slat wall system 52 are shown in Figure 7, it is preferred, but not necessary, that either one or the other be used on a single merchandising apparatus 15.

[0039] Referring again to Figures 1 through 6, the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 preferably includes the second merchandising element 28 detachably engaged with one of the base 16 and the shelving element 30 such that at least a portion of the second merchandising element 28 is positioned on a side of the shelving element 30 opposite from the base 16. Referring to Figure 7, the fourth preferred embodiment of the merchandising apparatus 15 can be used with or without the second merchandising element 28 (shown in phantom lines in Figure 7).

[0040] The second merchandising element 28 can be formed by any of the materials and in any of the shapes mentioned above in connection with the first merchandising element 18. Additionally, the first and second merchandising elements 18, 28 can be formed with three dimensional portions (not shown) that may enclose a hollow therein. These three dimensional portions allow portions of the first and second merchandising elements to have raised portions which can form objects, raised lettering or the like.

[0041] Referring to Figure 1, the positioning of the first and second merchandising elements 18, 28 on opposing sides of the shelf supported product 20 allows for the coordinated merchandising of the product 20. It is preferred, but not necessary, that the second merchandising element 28 have a shape corresponding to the product 20 being marketed. For example, when the product 20 being merchandised is shoes, it is preferred that the second merchandising element 28 be shaped in a facsimile of a shoe (in either two or three dimensions) and that the first merchandising element 18 be a mirror 22. It is

preferable that at least a portion of the second merchandising element 28 extends behind the shelving element 30 when viewed from in front of the merchandising apparatus 10.

[0042] Referring to Figure 3, the second merchandising element 28 can be an illuminated sign disposed over the top portion 42 of the base 16. The illuminated sign 28 can be powered by a light assembly housed within the base 16 or within the second merchandising element 28 itself. As shown in Figure 3, it is preferable, but not necessary, that the illuminated second merchandising element 28 be formed as an enclosure capable of housing light emitting elements, such as fluorescent bulbs (not shown). The light emitting elements and/or light assembly can be powered by a power source remote from the merchandising assembly 10, 12, 14, 15 via a power cord (not shown) or can be powered by internal batteries (not shown).

[0043] Referring to Figure 7, wheels 54 can be rotatably mounted to the base 16 to allow an operator to easily move the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14, 15 from one location to another. It is preferred that two wheels 54 are positioned proximate to one side of the base 16 to allow an operator to pivot the base 16 about one edge to allow the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14, 15 to be rolled to a new location.

[0044] A first preferred method of merchandising a product 20 is as follows. Unless otherwise specified, each of the components used with this method is the same as that described above in connection with the first, second, and third preferred merchandising apparatuses 10, 12, 14. Referring to Figure 1, the first preferred method for merchandising a product 20 includes providing a base 16 having a top portion 42 and a lateral side 44. The first preferred method can, but does not necessarily, include forming the base 16 to have the appearance of a masonry element.

[0045] The first preferred method of merchandising a product 20 includes the step of detachably engaging the first merchandising element 18 to the lateral side 44 of the base 16. When the product 20 being merchandised is shoes, it is preferable that the engaging of the

first merchandising element includes detachably engaging a mirror 22 to the lateral side 44 of the base 16.

[0046] The first preferred method of merchandising the product 20 includes the step of attaching the shelving element 30 to the base to support the product 20 above the base 16. It is preferable, but not necessary, that the shelving element 30 includes shelves which extend in at least two directions.

[0047] The first preferred method of merchandising the product 20 includes detachably engaging the second merchandising element 28 to one of the base 16 and the shelving element 30 such that at least a portion of the second merchandising element 28 is positioned generally over the shelving element 30. It is preferable, but not necessary, that the step of engaging a second merchandising element include detachably engaging a sign having a shape that corresponds to the product 20 being marketed. It is also preferable that at least a portion of the second merchandising element 28 extend behind the shelving element 30.

[0048] The first preferred method of merchandising the product 20 further includes coordinating the first and second merchandising elements 18, 28 to market the product 20. For example, it is preferable, but not necessary, that the first preferred method of merchandising a product 20 include providing a second merchandising element 28 that is a sign related to a shoe-type product, such as shoes, shoe laces, sole inserts, shoe polish, or the like, and that the first merchandising element 18 is a mirror (or other shoe related item or advertisement). Additionally, the step of engaging the second merchandising element can, but does not necessarily, include detachably engaging an illuminated sign to the base 16.

[0049] A second preferred method of merchandising a product 20 is as follows. Unless otherwise mentioned, the steps, materials, and components described above in connection with either the first, second or third preferred embodiments of the merchandising apparatus 10, 12, 14 or the first preferred method can be integrated and used with the second

preferred method of merchandising the product 20 without departing from the scope of the second preferred method of merchandising a product 20.

[0050] The second preferred method of merchandising a product 20 includes positioning the base 16 on the supporting surface 36. The second preferred method can, but does not necessarily, include providing a base 16 with an enclosed hollow area 38 (shown in Figure 4). When a base 16 containing a hollow area 36 is used with the second preferred method, it is preferable that water, sand or another type of ballast be placed within the hollow area 38 of the base 16 to increase the stability of the base 16.

[0051] The second preferred method of merchandising a product 20 includes the step of detachably engaging a merchandising element 18 with the base 16. The second preferred method also includes the step of detachably engaging a flexible merchandising element 28 with the top portion 42 of the base 16 by sliding one end of the flexible merchandising element 28 into the base 16 through the top portion 42 thereof. The merchandising element 18 and the flexible merchandising element 28 can be formed by any of the materials discussed above in connection with the first and second merchandising elements 18, 28.

[0052] The flexible merchandising element 28 is bendable in response to forces exerted in a direction generally normal to the flexible merchandising element to facilitate the stable positioning of the base 16. It should be understood that the forces created by wind along the surface of the flexible merchandising element 28 are considered "forces exerted in the direction generally normal to the flexible merchandising element" as used in the claims. It is preferable, but not necessary, that the flexible merchandising element 28 be capable of bending through an angle of at least thirty-five (35) degrees. Referring to Figure 2, a bent position 46 of the flexible merchandising element 28 is shown in phantom lines illustrating one bent position when the flexible merchandising element 28 is receiving wind gusts along a surface thereof.

[0053] The second preferred method of merchandising a product 20 includes coordinating the merchandising element 18 and the flexible merchandising element 28 to

market the product 20. The second preferred method of merchandising a product 20 results in a merchandising apparatus 12 that is well suited for use in outside environments.

[0054] It is recognized by those skilled in the art, that changes may be made to the above-described embodiments of this invention without departing from the inventive concept thereof. It is understood, therefore, that this invention is not limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but is intended to cover all modifications that are within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

* * *